



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mark Godcharles, mark.godcharles@noaa.gov
(727) 570-5305, FAX: (727) 570-5583
<http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>

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TRAP LIMITATION PROGRAM PROPOSED FOR THE STONE CRAB FISHERY IN FEDERAL WATERS OFF WEST FLORIDA

Proposals that would establish a Federal trap limitation program for the commercial stone crab fishery in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off Florida's west coast, including Monroe County, recently have been announced in the *Federal Register* (67 FR 19155, April 18, 2002) by NOAA Fisheries. This proposed Federal program would complement the stone crab trap limitation program recently implemented by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC). The proposals would enhance the effectiveness of the FFWCC program and, thereby, help to reduce overcapitalization in the stone crab fishery.

The proposed program was developed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) in Amendment 7 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Stone Crab Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP). Copies of Amendment 7 may be requested from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 U.S. Highway 301 North, Suite 1000, Tampa, FL 33619-2266; phone: 813-228-2815; fax: 813-225-7015; e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org.

In compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the Gulf Council has submitted Amendment 7 to NOAA Fisheries for review and consideration for approval. Concurrently, public review and comments also are solicited. Please send written comments to Mark Godcharles, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702. Comments also may be sent via fax to 727-570-5583. No comments submitted via e-mail or Internet will be accepted, nor will written comments received after June 17, 2002. If approved, implementation of the proposed Federal program would coincide with the expected

implementation of the FFWCC program, i.e., October 1, 2002.

In Amendment 7, the Gulf Council has proposed the following nine changes to the FMP to align Federal management of the stone crab fishery with the FFWCC trap reduction program.

(1) Recognize, but not require, Florida's stone crab licenses and trap tags for vessels operating in the Federal management area.

(2) Establish a Federal program to issue non-transferable (to other persons) vessel permits, trap certificates, and trap tags for EEZ use only.

(3) Provide opportunity to apply for the proposed Federal vessel permit to those who could meet the qualifying criteria but could not or chose not to obtain the stone crab vessel license or tags issued by the FFWCC.

(4) Allow applicants up to 90 days following the effective date of the final rule implementing Amendment 7 to apply for Federal permits and tags.

(5) Determine the number of Federal trap tags to be issued to qualifying persons by dividing his/her highest seasonal landings of stone crab claws during one of three fishing seasons (1995/96, 1996/97, or 1997/98) by 5 lbs.

(6) Charge a fee for the issuance of Federal trap tags and vessel permits and their annual renewals.

(7) Establish a Federal appeals process for those denied a Federal permit.

(8) Revise the Protocol (i.e., FMP Protocol and Procedure for an Enhanced Cooperative Management System) to reflect revisions to Florida's Constitution.

(9) Replace FMP management objective 3 with a new objective: Take regulatory action to increase catch per unit effort (CPUE) and reduce overcapitalization in terms of gear deployed in the fishery.

In accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NOAA Fisheries may publish a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* for public review and comment. In determining whether to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the proposals submitted by the Gulf Council, NOAA Fisheries will consider the comments received, whether specifically directed to the Amendment 7 document or its proposed rule. All comments received during the respective comment periods will be addressed in the final rule.

This and other *Southeast Fishery Bulletins* are available on the SERO Web homepage at (<http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>). To obtain considerable recorded information about our missions, services, and management measures, call our toll free public

service line at 1-866-570-5301. If the information you need is not available on that line, you can leave us a message and we'll get back to you within one business day.

Additional information on southeastern fisheries is available from the Gulf Council. The Web site and e-mail addresses for the Gulf of Mexico Council are **<http://www.gulfcouncil.org>** and **gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org**, respectively.

NOAA Fisheries, also known as the National Marine Fisheries Service, is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.